BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Felix Ballesteros

Felix Ballesteros, third of six children, was born to Ilocano immigrants, Telesforo and Maria Ballesteros, in 1932, in Kaʻelekū, Hana, Maui, where his father cultivated and harvested sugar cane for the Kaʻelekū Sugar Company.

In 1943, the family moved to Lānaʻi City, Lānaʻi, where Telesforo Ballesteros continued to work as an agricultural laborer for the Hawaiian Pineapple Company.

During World War II, Felix Ballesteros earned a little money shining the shoes of soldiers stationed on the island, while his mother supplemented the family income by doing the soldiers' laundry.

From the age of twelve, he also worked in the pineapple fields when Lānaʻi High and Elementary School was not in session.

Following graduation in 1951, he held various jobs on Lānaʻi and the Big Island of Hawaiʻi. He worked as a bowling alley pinsetter, a seasonal pineapple field worker, a construction worker, sugar cane harvester, seed cane planter, and coffee picker.

In 1955, he returned to Lānaʻi where he did seasonal work for Hawaiian Pineapple Company.

From 1956 to 1979, he worked at the Nishimura Service Station, taking on more and more tasks to the point of becoming a full-fledged mechanic, servicing Hawaiian Pineapple Company vehicles.

A school custodian on Lanai from 1979–1993 and a part-time employee of Maui Soda since 1975, Felix Ballesteros still works for Maui Soda Company.

Married since 1957, he is the father of two children, grandfather of four, and great-grandfather of two.

Tape No. 56-28-1-13

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Felix Ballesteros (FB)

Lānaʻi City, Lānaʻi

April 4, 2013

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is Warren Nishimoto interviewing Felix Ballesteros in Lānaʻi City on April 4, 2013.

Can you tell me again what year you were born and where you were born?

FB: I was born in 1932 in Kaʻelekū, Hāna, Maui.

WN: Okay. And you were telling me about your father [Telesforo Ballesteros] and he worked sugarcane . . .

FB: He worked for Kaʻelekū Sugar [Company]. He helped with harvesting. He helped with cultivation of sugarcane.

WN: I guess irrigation, too, huh?

FB: Irrigation, you didn't have to irrigate because it rained so much. But he helped with directing the water flow during harvest time. And during harvest time, you know, they float the sugarcane down a flume.

WN: Right. Was the flume made out of wood?

FB: The flumes were made of twelve-by-twelve planks. They nailed it together and they'd float it [i.e., the sugar stalks] down with water. They were in mountainous country sometimes. It's hard for the trucks to get up there. So they carried it to the flume.

WN: So the water would be flowing down the flume, and then your father folks would put the cut cane into the flume?

FB: Yeah.

WN: And then it would go down to where?

FB: Down to the railroad tracks where there were cane cars. They had a locomotive to pull it [i.e., the cut cane] to the mill in Hāna. It had to be transported about four miles away on those cane cars that the train [locomotive] pulled. So that's how they hauled all their sugarcane to Hāna. They didn't use trucks at that time.

WN: So the flume would end where the cane car was. The cane would stop there.

FB: No, but they had sugarcane other places where the cane truck could go. So from there, they would load it up with that crane. They call it a Northwest Crane. That's how they loaded the sugarcane.

WN: Okay. So in days before trucks, they had cane cars?

FB: The trucks would be only in the field just to take them to the place where the cane car would be on the bottom. Then the truck would reverse on that ramp and dump its load into the cane car, you know, the train car. Then the train would haul it all the way to the sugar mill.

WN: I see. So they would lay portable track so that the cane car can go to a certain place or was it permanent track?

FB: It was permanent tracks. Because the truck would bring the harvested sugarcane and dump the sugarcane into the sugarcane cars that the train hauled. Some places where the terrain was too bad, it was harder for the trucks to get in. That's why they used the flume.

WN: I see. That's real ingenious, yeah? (Chuckles)

FB: Yeah. I don't think it was only on Maui that they did that. I think on other islands where water was plentiful.

WN: So can you tell me where your father was from?

FB: My father was from the Philippines, a place they call Dingras, Ilocos Norte. He was recruited by the [Hawai'i] Sugar Planters [Association]. He had a contract to stay at least two years and then he would get a free trip back to the Philippines. They were contract workers.

WN: What year did he come to Hawai'i?

FB: Approximately 1924.

WN: Nineteen twenty-four.

FB: So he never did return back to the Philippines to take advantage of his reward as a contract worker. From that [Hāna] sugar plantation, he was needed to help the [pineapple] harvest on Lāna'i. In those days there were no harvesting machines.

WN: This is on Maui you're talking about?

FB: Here [i.e., Lāna'i].

WN: Oh, here. Oh, pineapple.

FB: Yeah, pineapple. That's how he got here.

WN: So he started in Hāna.

FB: Yeah. And he was supposed to return back to Hāna, but he decided he would like to stay here, which, to him, it was better.

WN: Okay. Did he ever tell you anything about his early life in Dingras, Ilocos Norte?

FB: In the Philippines?

WN: Yeah.

FB: His early life, all I know is, he was supposed to go to school. His mom would get him ready for school, give him his lunch pail. You know, they brought their own lunches. So he would go off to school and on his way to school, there was a secret place along the way. He would change back into his play clothes. And then he would play all day long out there, just play. Then when he looked, oh, school was over, put his good clothes back on, and come home. He didn't have to worry about lunch. His lunch was packed. So that's how he ended up; he couldn't read and he couldn't write. A lot of them, I guess, didn't like to go to school.

WN: And Ilocos Norte was like mostly agricultural?

FB: Mostly agriculture, I'd say. You know, you have a piece of land and you take care of it. You plant rice or plant vegetables. Some people plant tobacco or you plant corn and you raise your livestock for your food. So it was really just up to you. You work and when you get your crops out, most of it went for your family use. But you could sell some of it so that you could have some spending money to buy, you know, seasoning for your food.

WN: He came in 1924. Did he ever tell you why he wanted to come to Hawai'i?

FB: He was recruited by the sugar plantation. They said, "Oh, we'll give you a job and you can make so much money to bring home." After you go, maybe you get a bonus. At least you have some money to bring back to the Philippines for your family. In those days, [in the Philippines] it's not where you could just find a job and someone would pay you. I don't think it was like that, you know. In the country, whatever you grow on the land, you live on. You make some extra and get some extra money to buy clothes or your necessary items that you would like to live on. So you need money to at least buy salt. You need money to buy your clothes. Of course, some of them, they weave their own cloth to make your own clothing. So my mom had to learn how to—you know, they taught her how to weave.

WN: Well, let me ask you about your mother [Maria Ballesteros] now. What is your mother's background?

FB: My mother, when it was time, you know, to come of age, they arranged the wedding. Arranged who you married, too. Both families get together and they talk and say, "My son is ready for marriage so it's about time that we arrange a marriage partner." So the two families got together and they talked with each other without the prospective bride and groom knowing anything about it.

So when it was time for them to get married, my mom's parents said, "Oh, you have to dress up and put on your nice clothes and we're going to church because you're going to be a sponsor for somebody's baby to be baptized." So she dressed up in her good clothes and they went to the church.

My father, I guess they told him the same thing. So when they met at the church, they said, "Oh, where's the baby to be baptized?"

"No, there was a slight different arrangement. You're here to get married." So it was a surprise to both of them.

WN: Now who told you this story?

FB: My mom. She told me the story.

WN: (Chuckles) Now when she tells you that story, does she tell it happily or sadly or. . . .

FB: So she cannot back out. Both of them couldn't back out. The ceremony was going on already.

WN: Now where was this that they got married?

FB: This was down in the Philippines.

WN: In the Philippines. Now your mother was from Dingras, too?

FB: Yeah.

WN: Oh, okay. So they're from the same town then?

FB: Same town.

WN: I see. Do you know about what year they got married?

FB: About maybe 1917, '18.

WN: That's a great story.

FB: Yeah.

WN: (Chuckles) Real sneaky.

FB: Yeah. So for a while they couldn't believe it, but after a while, here I am.

(Laughter)

But before that, I had two brothers. They were both born in the Philippines.

WN: So before you were born in 1932 . . .

FB: I was born here in Hawai'i.

WN: You were born in Hawai'i, yeah. So then you have two older brothers?

FB: Yeah.

WN: I see, I see. So did your father and mother come to Hawai'i together?

FB: No, my father came first.

WN: Your father came first? Oh, then he went back to get married?

FB: No, they were married already.

WN: Oh, they were married, but he came first.

FB: He came first.

WN: Okay, okay.

FB: But he didn't return for several years. So my mom got worried and thought, "Hey, what's happened to him? No word." Of course, no word, he didn't know how to write. He couldn't even have someone write a letter for him. So she went to where the sugar planters' representatives were. "Oh, what's happened to my husband?"

They checked the records. "Oh, he's still in Hawai'i."

Then she asked, "Can I go to Hawai'i, too?"

They told her, "Oh, sure you can."

At first she was going to come here by herself and leave my two brothers behind. But then the younger brother said, "No. I want to go, too."

WN: And how old was the younger brother?

FB: At that time he was maybe eight years old or nine years old. He said, "I want to go, too."

So my mom said, "No, you have to stay back."

My brother said, "Okay." My brother started walking into the river. And each time it was getting deeper and deeper. Then he said, "No, I want to go."

My mom said, "No."

Kept on going further in where it got even deeper past his chest. Then my mother said, "Okay. Come out of the water. Come. You can come, too."

The older one, he had to stay back because we owned land there and he had to stay back to take care of the land.

WN: And how old was he?

FB: He's about ten maybe.

WN: Where did he stay? Who did he stay with? Who took care of him?

FB: With my mom's mother.

WN: Okay.

FB: So my mom and my [second] brother came.

WN: Do you know around what year?

FB: That was maybe about 1930.

WN: Did they go to Hāna?

FB: Yeah.

WN: Okay.

FB: The steamboat, I assume, went to Honolulu. Then from there, with new supplies, it went on to Hāna. There was a wharf over there where you could transport the. . . . You know, they stop there and you could go on land.

WN: So your mom and your dad were reunited in 1930 along with your . . .

FB: My older brother.

WN: Your older brother. Okay. That's an interesting story. (Chuckles) That's a very interesting story.

FB: Yeah.

WN: So they were reunited at Kaʻelekū Sugar Company?

FB: Yeah.

WN: Okay. You were born in 1932, yeah?

FB: Yeah.

WN: And you stayed in Hāna until 1943.

FB: Yeah.

WN: So eleven years old. So tell me about what was growing up in Hāna like for you up until age eleven when you left?

FB: Well, it's the only place I knew at that time and I had friends there. It was a great place to live. A lot of things to do.

WN: Like what?

FB: We rode a bus to school. It wasn't a real bus. It's just a truck that they put a covering in the back and put seats. Not the regular seats but just like a bench. That's the bus we rode to school every day.

WN: How far away was your [school] . . .

FB: About four miles.

WN: Four miles?

FB: Four or five miles, yeah.

WN: What was your house like in Hāna?

FB: My house? The houses were made just like what we have here [on Lānaʻi]. You know, the ones that are fenced up there? Just like that. Made with two-by-ten pieces of lumber. To dress up the walls, they put paper on it. They put some kind of paste and they used newspapers to paste on the wall. So that was just like the wallpaper. There was no ceiling. Open beam, you could see the roof. Later on, as the sugar companies started producing what they call canec, then they put a ceiling. That's the type of house we had. It was usually two bedrooms, one living room, and one kitchen. No toilet or shower in the house. If you wanted to take a bath, there was another small house that my dad folks constructed. You'd make hot water and put it in a barrel. That was our tub. The barrel was just like the wooden barrels. You cut it in half and you put water inside. You put in your water and that was your tub.

WN: So you took turns to use the tub?

FB: Well, when we took a bath, all the boys took a bath at one time. The girl would take a bath a separate time.

WN: But only one person can fit in the tub, though, at one time?

FB: In the tub?

WN: Oh, you wouldn't go inside the tub?

FB: No. Just put the water and we used our hand to rinse ourselves.

WN: I see. So the tub had hot water inside?

FB: Yeah. Of course, when you want to relieve yourself, there was an outhouse. Just a hole with a board on it and you sit on it. You use any kind of paper you could find. Brown paper bag, Sears Roebuck catalog, newspapers. There was no toilet tissue. The closest we would get to toilet tissue, you know, was when they ship fruits to the islands, oranges, they had that tissue paper wrapped around each individual fruit. That was the softest tissue we could find, plantation days.

WN: There were your mother, your father, your older brother . . .

FB: Then I had a . . .

WN: Then you.

FB: Yeah. Then I had a brother.

WN: A younger brother.

FB: A sister, and then a younger brother.

WN: Younger brother. Okay, there were actually four boys, one girl?

FB: A total of five boys. Two were born in the Philippines.

WN: Counting the one that stayed behind?

FB: Yeah.

WN: Right, okay. So did you folks have a garden in Hāna?

FB: Yes. My dad had a piece of land and he gardened. He used horse manure to mix with the soil. I don't know if he had any fertilizer, but horse manure was the thing at the time. We lived close to the [plantation] stable. In those days, they used a lot of horses and mules for the plantation work. So at the stable, there was a pile where they throw all the manure. We just go and get manure to mix with the soil. So he grew eggplant, beans—Filipino beans. He grew bitter melon, another fruit called *kabatiti,* squash, pumpkins, potatoes. Sweet potatoes, you could eat young shoots off the vine. We also grew another plant with the round leaves they call *kalamunggay.* The petals are—*kalamunggay* leaves—that's round. If you talk to any Filipino, they know what *kalamunggay* is.

WN: Does it have a bean, too? Has sort of a bean growing out . . .

FB: Yes. And you can eat those seed pods, also. But then you don't eat the shell. You cook it, and then you scrape the soft inner part inside.

WN: So you could eat the leaves and the beans of the *kalamunggay*.

FB: Yes. They also had what we call Chinese yams. We call it *singkamas*. You can eat the beans of that and you can eat, of course, the potato part, the part that is used. Yams. Chinese use it for chop suey. But when we were young, we looked for a vine. Oh, maybe the potato is big enough to harvest. So we go and follow the root and dig and find. And we'd eat that potato part—which is the Chinese yam—we take off the skin and eat that raw. It was sweet. It was good to eat. In those days, you know, we didn't have too much money to go and buy candy or ice cream. So if we had something to eat, we'd eat that. Also sugarcane. We sort of smash the sugarcane [stalk] and eat the inside, chew on it. So that's how we got along in Hāna.

WN: Did you eat meat at all?

FB: Meat? Yes. When the store had meat, my dad would buy meat or if they slaughtered a cow. Several families would get together and then they would buy a whole cow. Then we get meat like that. Or my father raised pigs. That's how we would get some pork once in a while. Not all the time. And chickens, too. So that's how we had some kind of meat to eat.

Of course, the ocean was close. Hāna, Kaʻelekū, was a good fishing ground. You would catch *pāpio* with a just plain bamboo pole, not a spinning reel. And the *moi* was allowed, too. You could get *akule*. I attended a *hukilau* once in Hāna. You know, I didn't know what a *hukilau* was. But he said, "Come and participate." So I went. When they brought in the catch from that *hukilau,* I brought home three *akule*. That was my share.

WN: So you helped pull in the . . .

FB: I didn't help. I just went along. But that *hukilau* was done in Hāna Bay.

WN: So who were your neighbors living in Kaʻelekū? Were they all Filipino or were they all different kind?

FB: They were mostly Filipinos. There were Hawaiians. And there were Portuguese and Puerto Ricans. There was one single German man, but he was not affiliated with Germany during the war [World War II]. They just suspected him because he was a German.

WN: Oh, this is when the war started?

FB: Yeah. There were some Japanese people and some Chinese people also. There was this Japanese man, he operated a bakery. He baked *manjū*, muffins, bread, and biscuits. He used, I guess, a wood-burning stove oven. I saw him. He used guava wood for firewood. We didn't have *kiawe* like here on Lānaʻi, but there was a lot of guava bushes and they would use guava. My mom used guava wood for her stove in the beginning. We didn't have kerosene stove.

WN: So you remember your mom cooking on a wood stove?

FB: Yeah. It's just like a table. You line it with sheet metal. You know that roofing iron?

WN: Yeah, the *totan?*

FB: *Totan.* Then you build your fire in that in the house. Then you would span two pieces of pipe across, and you would somehow put your pot on it and you cook on that. That's how my mom cooked. We didn't have the regular wood-burning stove or kerosene stove until later.

WN: Could she bake at all?

FB: No, she didn't bake until we got the kerosene stove. Then they had that oven that you put on the kerosene stove to bake your bread. She made that Portuguese-style bread. She learned that from a Portuguese neighbor. And incidentally, that Portuguese neighbor was midwife for me when I was born. So they got to be good friends. And the lady, she taught her how to bake Portuguese bread. At that time, there was no regular yeast. I used to see my mom somehow chop up an Irish potato and let it ferment and that's what she used for yeast to make the bread rise, regular Portuguese bread.

WN: Wow.

FB: So her bread was good.

WN: What other things do you remember your mother doing? For example, laundry . . .

FB: She did the laundry. Everything was done by hand. No washing machine until later. Maybe about 1939 or 1940 then they had the first washing machines come out. We had the roller and you had the other type that you transfer your clothes in a basket, close the lid, and it would spin dry.

WN: Before the washing machine, how did she do it?

FB: She used a paddle.

WN: A paddle? Okay.

FB: Yeah, you would soak your clothes and beat it with a paddle. Of course, you had that scrub board. And then you would use the brush. We call that *sentaku* brush. Hard . . .

WN: You mean the brown one?

FB: Yeah, the square one. You put soap and you brush it. Then you hit it with a paddle.

WN: You know the scrub board, was that smooth or did they have the ridges?

FB: It had those corrugated . . .

WN: Ah. I guess like a washboard.

FB: Yeah. That was afterwards.

WN: Oh, before that, what did she . . .

FB: It was just with a paddle and pound it. You shake it around and then pound it. And then rinse it. And if still some more dirt on it, you pound it some more.

WN: This was all like work clothes, too, so it would be dirty, yeah?

FB: Yeah. So afterwards, they got to boiling water and sort of cook the clothes with soap. Those days, you didn't have granulated soap. It was just plain bar soap. White soap with a blue stripes inside or brown soap. You would rub it on your clothes and that's the type of soap they used first. That same soap you would use for washing dishes. Afterwards, they came out with granulated suds.

WN: What were some of the chores you had to do as a kid around the house?

FB: Oh, not much. We just play.

(Laughter)

Maybe she would tell us, "Go and rake the yard." But I don't remember doing too much of that. Mostly play.

WN: So when you said you "played," what kind of things did you do to have fun as a small kid in Hāna?

FB: Before I started school, we played. We used to make what we call a train. We would put that tomato sardine can as the train. Then we put a stone in it. Then we tie those oil sardine cans together. Just like they're the train cars and we pull it along.

WN: Okay. So the sardine can was like rectangular . . .

FB: The square kind just like today. That was the cars.

WN: And what, you would tie them together?

FB: Yeah, with string. We pull that along and that's our train. We had to make our own toys almost. We didn't buy any.

WN: Right, right.

FB: Our friend had. My friend, his name was Alfred Victorine, [Jr.]. His parents, I guess, they thought of getting them toys. So they had toy trucks and toy other things. I used to go and play with him

because he had toy truck, toy car. And we push it along to make sort of a road for the car to follow. They had store-bought toys. We didn't have.

WN: So besides the sardine-can train, what else did you folks make?

FB: Sometimes, the barrel, the hoop? The hoops?

WN: Yeah, yeah. From the barrel. The metal hoop?

FB: Yeah, the metal piece. We would have a piece of wire, just like a *U.* We would use that to roll the hoop around. So that's another toy. Then, of course, my friends made slingshots. So we played with slingshots, too.

WN: What did you use for rubber?

FB: Inner tube.

WN: (Chuckles) From the car tire?

FB: Inner tube. And then the leather part where you put your stone in, we'd find an old leather shoe and cut it. That's what we used to hold a stone in our slingshot.

WN: And what did you used to shoot with the slingshot?

FB: We pick up gravel stones. Sometimes there are round pebbles near the shore. But we had all homemade toys. Oh, yeah. We used to play with a little boat. That came from—I don't know if you know what a poinciana tree is, with red flowers and they have a pod. When the pod dries up, it opens up. It looks like a boat. When it opens up, it looks like a skiff. I don't know if you notice that. The pod from the poinciana tree.

WN: I'm not sure. I don't know.

FB: So, anyway, here we have a poinciana tree as you enter the post office over there. It's corner of that [Mike] Carroll Gallery. As you enter the post office parking lot, there's a tree there. Sometimes there are pods. When the pod dries up and it opens and the seeds come out, it's shaped like a little boat. Another thing that we used to play with on that poinciana tree, after the flowers or before it flowers, there's a bud. We used to knock down the bud. Sometimes the flowers, the buds, fall when the branch falls. Then we take those buds and pinch the point off. You would squeeze it and water would shoot out. The other name that we call that tree is the "water shoot-shoot tree." Because the buds—you pinch off the point and you squeeze it, it will shoot water out. Then when those are developed and the pods are developed and it's still green, then we knock some off and we use it just like a dagger, a knife, and then we played with that. When it dries up, it becomes a boat. So we named the tree a "boat tree," the poinciana tree. I didn't know it was [called] poinciana. But we just called it the "water shoot-shoot tree" or the "boat tree." (WN chuckles.) That's growing-up time.

WN: Were most of your friends growing up Filipino?

FB: No, my best friend was. . . . I don't know if he was Portuguese or Hawaiian or something. Victorine. He was my classmate and friend. Of course, there's the Portuguese family. The lady was Portuguese, but her husband was Filipino. That family was the Ribao family. On Maui, I

think, they still have Ribaos. So those people are still there. I think there are two brothers yet, if I'm not mistaken, still living on Maui. Of course, they're older than I so they must be around close to ninety now. So we were good friends with the Portuguese family. Portuguese, but her husband was Filipino. So I mostly played with them.

During the Second [World] War, the war started when I was still in Kaʻelekū. When Pearl Harbor was bombed and they spoke about war, I didn't know what war was about. The only thing I remember is, when we went to the movie, they showed a newsreel on the attack on Pearl Harbor. But I didn't know what that was about. I didn't realize that was in Honolulu. Those days, they had blackouts. They would have a warden going around and he was carrying a little shotgun as his weapon, a 410 shotgun which spread shots. I guess that would stop anybody.

(Laughter)

Then my friends, they figured out they had to dig a bomb shelter. So they dug a bomb shelter in their yard. In our yard, we didn't have any bomb shelter. Then later on, they said everybody must have a gas mask. So we went and tried to get gas masks. All the gas masks that were available were too big for us. They didn't issue us any because they didn't fit. The only one that had a gas mask in the family was my mom. And we didn't have a gas mask. If there was a gas attack, that was *aloha.*

(Laughter)

WN: Now you talked about blackout.

FB: Gas masks.

WN: No, I mean, earlier you talked about blackout. What was that like? You said there was somebody who went around with a shotgun. What did you have to do?

FB: He was the warden to go around and check to make sure all lights are out.

WN: I see. So nighttime, you had to be no lights?

FB: No lights.

WN: You had to cover your windows or what?

FB: Cover the windows. When I first arrived here on Lānaʻi, all the windows were covered. All the homes. Every home had a cover over the window. They made sort of a box over the window so that if you open the light, you couldn't see the light. But then you could open your window and have fresh air.

WN: So they put the box outside?

FB: Outside.

WN: Outside of the window?

FB: Outside of the window. That was on Lānaʻi when we got here.

WN: Well, let me ask you about Lānaʻi. You came to Lānaʻi in 1943.

FB: Yeah.

WN: You were eleven years old.

FB: Eleven years old.

WN: Did you ever ask your father and mother why they moved to Lāna‘i?

FB: No. I only know that because he was working here, he said, “We have to move to Lāna‘i.”

Then I asked, “When are we going back?” Because I thought we were going to stay here only for the summer or something, but when we came here, school already started. We had to enroll in this school over here. So I thought when school would be over, we would be going back to Hāna. It never happened. I missed my friends in Hāna. But gradually, I got used to staying here. I made new friends.

Our first home was down Block 21 next to Lālākoa.

WN: Lālākoa?

FB: Yeah. Lālākoa I. That was Block 21. Below our block, that was Block 35, there were two rows of houses that the military—the army—used for their barracks. There were no fences around it, but there were air raid shelters there. But being that Lāna‘i rained so much, during the rainy season, it would fill up with water, the bomb shelters. And at the end there was a building that they used for a mess hall, something like what the Filipino clubhouse or the Hawaiian church down there at Fifth Street is. You know, on Fifth Street, there’s a Hawaiian church and the Filipino clubhouse. Those were boardinghouses in the beginning just like the army used at Block 21. That was their mess hall and that’s where they cooked on KP duty. At night they would show movies on a 16-millimeter movie camera and it’s just like the movies at the theater, same kind. And we would go watch the movies, free. Here at a regular theater, it was five cents admission. It was not too bad.

WN: But the movie that the army showed, where was that? Inside the . . .

FB: Inside the boardinghouse.

WN: Boardinghouse, I see.

FB: And we would go there and watch when they showed the movies. Because we see, oh, they have a movie going on. So we asked them, “Can we come in to watch, too?”

They said, “Sure. Come inside.” (WN chuckles.) The soldiers were good.

WN: So you got along with them?

FB: Oh, yes. Even my dad got along with them and my mom. My mom used to do their laundry. Oh, when they knew that my mom did laundry, boy, there was so many clothes to wash. I don’t know how my mom kept track of all the laundry that they brought.

WN: But by that time, she had a machine?

FB: She had one of those old washing machines and she’d wash clothes all night long. Then she would iron their clothes—starch and iron—you know, their uniforms. So that was all done in that

community washhouse. Then there was a community clothesline. She would—all the clothesline would be full of military clothes.

WN: They would pay her?

FB: They would pay her. I don't know how much she charged per piece. It's cheap. I think maybe twenty-five cents apiece or fifty cents apiece, I don't know. But they were good. The soldiers, they didn't make any humbug.

WN: So when you folks came here, it was right in the middle of the war, yeah, 1943.

FB: Just about. We had to ride a boat called the *Nai'a* from Lahaina to Kaumālapa'u Harbor.

WN: How many were you in the family at that time?

FB: At that time, there was my two brothers and my sister that came to Lāna'i with my mom.

(Interview interrupted, then resumes.)

At that time, my brother was old enough to be in the service. So during the Second World War, he was in the [U.S.] Army. He served in the Pacific all the way to Japan when the war ended and then later, on to Korea. And he was in Vietnam also. My older brother, he made the military his career.

WN: This is your older brother?

FB: My older brother. The one that went into the stream and said, "I want to go to Hawai'i, too." So he made his career in the military. He got married to a Japanese girl in Japan. Of course, he was married before that in the Philippines, but his wife died in the Philippines. His wife and child died there. They got sick and they died in the Philippines. So he was widowed there. But he . . .

WN: So your older brother who was born in the Philippines and came over with your mother to Hawai'i, did he move to Lāna'i with you folks?

FB: No. When we were on Maui, he moved to the Big Island with my uncle. He lived on the Big Island. So from the Big Island, he volunteered into the army. He got his training in California and then from there he was shipped to the Pacific theater. So he saw some action, which he didn't say too much about. So from the Philippines, he moved on to Japan and then Korea. But that's how he met his wife—in Japan.

WN: I guess it was occupation forces when he was there.

FB: Yeah. His wife, a Japanese girl, she's in Honolulu now. She's a widow now because my brother passed away. She speaks English pretty good and she drives in Honolulu. Real nice lady from Japan.

WN: What became of your oldest brother, the one who stayed in the Philippines?

FB: The one that stayed back, while he was in the Philippines, he climbed a tree and he got into an accident and fell off the tree. And that's how he died. So my oldest brother died in the Philippines.

WN: Did your father and mother ever go back to visit at all?

FB: No. He came to Hawai‘i and the farthest my father got, I guess, was here on Lāna‘i. From Philippines to Honolulu, then to Maui, and then to Lāna‘i. He never did go anywhere else. He didn’t see the Big Island, he didn’t see any of the other islands.

WN: I’m just wondering, if your older brother, the one that went in the water, if he didn’t do that, he may have never seen his mother and father again.

FB: Maybe. We had a piece of land and we don’t know what happened to the land, but some people say the one who pays the tax for the land is the owner of the land just like here, I guess. So I guess distant relatives or somebody took over our piece of land in the Philippines. But it doesn’t matter. The land belongs to somebody else now.

WN: So you came to Lāna‘i and you were living in an area near the military, the hall and so forth. You were near that area.

FB: We didn’t have any problems with the military. Sometimes we’d go and visit them. We bring our shoebox to shine shoes. “Can we shine your shoes?” They bring out their shoes and we shine their shoes. And we charge them twenty-five cents a pair of shoes. No, not twenty-five cents. Ten cents for their shoes.

WN: Tell me what did your shoebox look like?

FB: Just like a house.

WN: A house?

FB: Just like a toolbox. It was like that.

WN: Made out of wood?

FB: I made my own out of orange crates.

WN: Okay. Had a lid on it and you put all your things inside?

FB: Yeah, inside. Then if they had their shoes on, they could step on the shoebox and I would work on it.

WN: So you would kneel down. They would put their foot on top the box, and you would shine shoes?

FB: Yeah, shine. (WN chuckles.) As a little business.

WN: Did a lot of you kids do that?

FB: Yeah, a lot of other kids did that. But there was another person, a Portuguese boy. The military was supposed to be his exclusive customers. So we were just like infringing on his territory. So one day I was shining a shoe. Then I saw him coming. I took my equipment and ran away. He started chasing. He said, “Get out of my territory!”

(Laughter)

So we didn't bother his territory after that.

WN: So when you say "territory," you mean a certain place?

FB: That complete two rows of housing that the military used.

WN: I see, I see.

FB: Yeah, that is his territory.

WN: So this is like right down here where the Lāna'i Avenue side. Near Lālākoa, is that where that military place was?

FB: We hardly saw them around. I guess they were on maneuvers or something. Or they had patrol.

WN: Oh, I see. So you would like see them walking on the street and you would say . . .

FB: Sometimes. Sometimes we see them walking on the street going to the movie.

WN: Ah, and so you ask them if you can shine shoes?

FB: Yeah. Then we go around the camp and see the Filipino single men. And they would bring out their shoes for us to work on.

WN: And did you shine military shoes differently from the civilian shoes?

FB: Oh, same thing.

WN: Spit shine?

FB: Ah, it was okay. Good enough. It's not like how they do it today, you know, the military. Everything is really—just like a mirror.

WN: But your time, you used to spit and shine?

FB: Ah, sometimes.

(Laughter)

But we just make it plain with no *pah-pah-pah!*

WN: Oh, yeah, with the cloth?

FB: Yeah. We just shine it and get it done and collect our ten cents.

WN: What did you do with the ten cents? What did you do with the money you got shining shoes?

FB: Oh, go to the store and buy soda or ice cream cone, candy. That's what we use it for. Sometimes we go to the military store called the PX and buy their cookie. They had sugar wafers. That was good. Ginger snaps. That's the only two types of cookies that they sold. So we'd spend it there.

WN: So when you were hanging out shining shoes and things like that, who were your friends? Who did you hang out with?

FB: Oh. There was this neighbor of mine. His name was George Morita. He's my classmate, also. He got me into taking care of honeybees. So we would make our own beehive. We make the honeycomb frame and stick it in an apple box. Those days the apple box is made of wood. Then we'd make a little opening on the bottom for the bees to get in and we put a cover. But then we need the bees. So we would go and get the honeybees. When we see a honeybee nest, we would put long-sleeved jackets, leather gloves, and I don't know where we got our cap with the screen. I guess he got it from somewhere because the company used to take care of a lot of honeybees down Keōmuku. I guess somehow he got that hat with the screen. And we put that hat on with the screen and cover up with jacket and long sleeve. Jacket and that leather glove. So we'd go and put a box underneath that swarm of bees and then shake that branch and it would fall into that box. I would carry the box with the bees in it, assuming the queen is inside, and I'd carry it home, and put it in that beehive that I made. He and I used to do that. So we'd go all over the place looking for a beehive. And if the people have a beehive, we'd ask them, "Can we have the bees?"

And he said, "Go ahead and take 'em." So that's how we collected honeybees. In the end, if I got stung, I take a piece of mud, rub it on where the bee had stung, and it wouldn't swell up too long.

WN: Mud?

FB: Yeah, a hardened piece of mud.

WN: Oh, yeah?

FB: So I wasn't afraid of bees. I was about maybe twelve or thirteen years old. So we'd take care of the bees. Then there was a time we went all the way down to where there's that electric power plant now down there?

WN: Yeah, yeah.

FB: There was a little camp called Miki Camp. We tried to get the beehive, the main bees. But we couldn't get 'em. All we got was honey. So all we did was take the honey, put 'em in the box, and that's what we brought home. We brought home the honey but not the hive.

WN: So after you get the hive, you put 'em inside, you transport it to your homemade hive?

FB: Yeah.

WN: How long it takes them to produce honey?

FB: Oh, not too long.

WN: Yeah? What, weeks, or months, or. . . .

FB: Oh, maybe in a week's time or more, then they start building the honeycomb. That's what they build first so that the queen can lay her eggs. Then after they get some that gather honey, some that gather pollen, and then some gather the wax to make the honeycomb.

WN: Then what would you do with the honey?

FB: Oh, we eat the honey. But after eating so much, it's so sweet, you cannot eat too much.

WN: (Chuckles) Would you put it in a container or something?

FB: No, we just take the honeycomb and then just chew on it. It's good, sweet, but you can eat only so much. Honey is good, but not too much. I don't know. We just—we ate. But the beekeepers down Keōmuku, they had where they would extract the honey from the honeycombs. The person that knows how it's done is Bob [Roberto] Hera. In school, we had a class in agriculture about taking care of honeybees. So somehow the school was taking care of the beehives in Keōmuku. So while they were extracting the honey from the honeycombs, they had an accident. It exploded. Bob Hera knows the story about that one.

WN: I'll go ask him. (Chuckles)

FB: Bob Hera and the honeybee.

WN: The honey that you and this George Morita did was only just for your own. . .

FB: We just were playing.

WN: Oh, you didn't sell the honey or anything like that?

FB: No, no. Just for play.

WN: Okay. (Chuckles)

FB: We'd get stung by the bee. After a while, it's not that bad. We got used to it.

WN: (Chuckles) Now when you came here, you were about eleven years old. How did you make friends? You were kind of like the newcomer, huh?

FB: Well, going to school, you know, they get a lot of students. After a while, you get to know them. Then some live next to you. Like where I lived, these new—these people came from Lahaina area. Their parents moved to Lānaʻi, too. So that's how we got to know them. And there were these other boys, they come and they talk story with us. Then we get along together, do things. We used to go and play. We had a rubbish dump down here at the end of the city, you know, further in, in Lālākoa III. The gulch was there and that was the rubbish dump. We'd go and play there. They would come and play there, too, during the summer. So we'd see them around.

Then there were times when we played marbles. And we would play with the spinning top. They all had spinning top. When it's time to play with spinning top, they would play with tops, too.

WN: You make your own tops?

FB: Sometimes we make our own top. Or we'd play with marbles. We'd wager with each other and bet marbles. There was a four-hole game that we played with marbles. After you reach the end, then you come, just like in checkers, you be the king. Then whoever's [marble] you hit with your marble, you get to keep his marble.

WN: Oh, you had to go all the way around first?

FB: Yeah.

WN: Put your marble inside the hole?

FB: Yeah. You shoot your marble and make it go in the hole. Then you go to the next one.

WN: How far apart were the holes?

FB: All depends on how we would like to make it. Sometimes we make it far away; sometimes we make it near. That was five-hole marbles. Then we have another where we call it "ring." You bet marbles. Maybe five marbles, you put 'em in the center. Each guy put five. And you would shoot at the five and whatever marble that you knock out of the ring, you get to keep.

WN: You have one marble that you use for your shooter?

FB: Yeah, for your main marble. To shoot the other marbles out. There's another game. I don't know exactly what the name is. But we would bet. Then you, say, bet ten marbles, okay. Everybody put and then you put 'em in your hand. And there's a hole. Say, okay, how many you want me to put inside? Okay, we'll say three marbles. Okay, then you drop the bunch of marbles and try to make three go inside. If you make more than three go inside, you lose all your marbles. And then if you put only two, then you only have one more to put. So if you try and put that one in and you put one in, you get to keep all the marbles. Another game again. Sometimes they say, "Let's bet fifty." So you count fifty and you have to hold marbles over here . . .

WN: Oh, your forearm?

FB: . . . and then try. And said, "Put one marble inside." So you drop it carefully so that only one will go in. If two goes in, you lose all that hundred marbles. (WN chuckles.) Once I played with this person. Both my pockets were full. I won all his marbles. Then he said, "Don't go away. I'll go and get some more marbles at home." So he got his marbles. So we start playing again. And gradually, my pockets emptied. (WN laughs.) I started with only five marbles. That was mostly all his marbles. So I actually lost only five marbles in the whole game. So I almost took all his marbles. (WN chuckles.)

WN: Yeah.

FB: Then, of course, we used to play baseball. I wasn't good at that. I was not a baseball player.

WN: Where did you play baseball?

FB: Field.

WN: There was a field over here? Which field did you play at?

FB: When we played baseball?

WN: Yeah.

FB: You know, in front of any open park where there's enough space, we would play. Softball or maybe sometimes we use a tennis ball for our ball. You know, some of them, they're good at it. They'd hit that tennis ball far away. But then sometimes we played in the regular baseball field. The baseball field is where those apartments below the service station where Warren Osako lives. That was the baseball field, football field, and track field. So they'd play games over there. Or

we'll find an open space and we play in there. Then we would challenge this side camp, they say Down Camp and this side Up Camp. The two camps get together. Up Camp challenge the bottom camp.

WN: You guys were what? Bottom camp [i.e., Down Camp]?

FB: We were the [Down] Camp.

WN: Now were you folks who were living over there, was it, you know, mixed nationality?

FB: Mixed, yes. But a lot of Japanese were living this side, by the Stable Camp. But afterwards, got to be mixed up. Everybody live everywhere.

WN: So by the time you were a boy, you remember more mixed?

FB: There was practically a mixture already. They had Korean Camp, they had Stable Camp.

WN: Who lived in Stable Camp? Anybody—I mean, people who worked in the stables?

FB: Well, those were close by. Like Warren Osako was near there. They call that Stable Camp. Then on the other end of the city near Church Street, they had a Korean Camp. Jane [Lee] Gabriel used to live there. Korean Camp. Below that, there's a purple church. They call that where the Filipino Federation [of America] used to be.

WN: The Moncado?

FB: Yeah. That's Federation Camp.

WN: That was Bob Hera folks?

FB: Bob Hera, yes. There were no homes below that Fraser Avenue before. Now you have homes below that all the way down to the Hawaiian homesteads.

WN: Where were the Hawaiian homesteads?

FB: Right now?

WN: Yeah.

FB: Hawaiian Homes? You know just past the school.

WN: Oh, okay, okay. You're talking about nowadays Hawaiian homesteads. Hawaiian Home Lands.

FB: Yeah. There weren't any before.

WN: I see, I see. Okay.

FB: But below that Fraser Avenue, mostly they had some gardens. That was mainly victory gardens, banana patch, and more below was pineapple field.

WN: It's 3:45 now.

FB: Okay, how long more you're going to go?

WN: We should end now, yeah, and we can continue another time. That's okay, yeah? You got to get back to work.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 56-29-2-13

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Felix Ballesteros (FB)

Lānaʻi City, Lānaʻi

April 18, 2013

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: Today is April 18, 2013 and we're at the Lānaʻi Culture and Heritage Center in Lānaʻi City, Lānaʻi. This is Warren Nishimoto and I'm interviewing Felix Ballesteros.

And again, Mr. Ballesteros, good afternoon.

FB: Good afternoon.

WN: First question I want to ask you—I mean, we already talked story last time. This is our second session. I wanted to ask you, when you were going to high school in Lānaʻi High [and Elementary] School, starting at twelve years old, you worked in the pineapple fields, yeah?

FB: Yes.

WN: Can you tell me what kind of work did you do in the pineapple field?

FB: The first job that they gave us was to cultivate the grass [around] the pineapple plants to make sure the plant has the utmost opportunity to grow another pineapple. That's where the money is, the fruit.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: So your first job was weeding? Cutting the grass?

FB: They call that weeding. To do the job, they gave us gloves and goggles so that when you put it on you look like a little fly. And then they give you the tool to take out the weeds.

WN: What did the tool look like?

FB: It's shaped like a knife, but it had two points like that. So you could go in between. As you go in between the weeds, you would cut the main root off. Then another tool they did give you is regular hoe.

WN: It was a hoe?

FB: Yeah. Of course, they gave you canvas pants—we call it chaps—to wear over your regular pants so that you don't get poked too much from the pineapple. Of course, if you wanted to, you could

use a straw hat or a regular baseball cap to protect you from the sun. So that was the first job most of us had to do.

WN: That was when you started at twelve years old?

FB: Yeah. After that, they find they wanted you to help with the harvesting. So they sent you out to certain fields and they make you go and pick up whatever pineapples that were left [after the regular harvest]. After that, they gave you the regular job of harvesting the places where they have the pineapple turning ripe.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

That was what you call harvesting with a regular canvas bag. You would slip it over your shoulders, fill it up [with pineapple], and carry it out to the road so you can remove the tops and put in boxes.

WN: And you did that, too?

FB: Yeah.

WN: So how many pineapples can you fit in one canvas bag?

FB: It depends on the size of the pineapple, but on the average, you can put twenty or more pineapples in the bag. Not only in the bag, you have to put some on your shoulders like this and pile 'em up and grab some with your other hand.

WN: So you put [picked pineapple] in the bag that's slung over your shoulder, but at the same time, to carry more out, you're carrying some more?

FB: Yeah. Actually you could put maybe a dozen [in the bag] and [carry] a little bit more on the side. You have to arrange the way you put your pineapples and not just throw it inside. Otherwise, if you don't put it neatly, then you cannot carry more than what you'd like to carry. Because the more you carry out, the more pineapple that you can put in the boxes, and the more boxes you can fill up, then if you pass the day-work amount, you get paid a contractor's pay for each box that you do.

WN: So you would get paid by the hour generally, but . . .

FB: Yeah, if you don't attain that number of boxes to fill up, then they call it day-work and you get paid just by the hour. So if you like make a little bit more, you pick little bit more and fill up more boxes. Maybe the average was about twenty boxes a day. The real good pickers sometimes they make close to a hundred boxes a day. They were strong guys. And it all depended if you had a lot of pineapple to pick in your location.

WN: So you were assigned like a line? One line or one section?

FB: Yeah. The lines were usually vertical to the road. But some places it was parallel to the road. So I forgot how it was already. But as far as I can remember, I think they were parallel to the road. You go half into the block and then come back to the road. From the other road, the next person would come to the half of the block and go back to the road.

WN: Oh, I see. So you would start in opposite directions.

FB: Yeah.

WN: Sort of work toward . . .

FB: From one road to the. . . .

WN: I see. And the crates were on the road.

FB: The crates were on the first line or on the side of the road. The person that came and brought you boxes, they'd look at how much pineapple you have and they'll drop you off so many boxes. If you didn't have too much pineapple piled up, then he drop you only a few.

WN: I see. So you would go in with your sack, fill it up with pineapple, come back out, dump it on the road . . .

FB: Yeah. The beginning, you don't have the boxes.

WN: Okay.

FB: So you just make a big pile of pineapple.

WN: I see. So he would see how fast you're going and that would determine how many crates he . . .

FB: Yeah.

WN: I see.

FB: Now each plant had a ripening pineapple. It used to be, sometimes the pineapple is not ripe yet. So you cannot pick the green ones. They would tell you what kind of pineapple to pick. There was a designation of one-eighth, quarter yellow, half yellow, or full yellow. They would tell you, "Today we want you to pick anything from one-eighth." Means if a little bit color, you pick 'em already all the way to full yellow. That's how they told you.

WN: This is usually what? Fresh fruit kind or cannery kind?

FB: Uh, you mean . . .

WN: Well, you had to take the top off eventually?

FB: Oh, yeah.

WN: So that's not fresh fruit then, yeah?

FB: Yeah. You have to cut. Every one they had to cut the top off and trim the bottom to make sure it was ready for the Ginaca machine [in the cannery in Honolulu]. So that it would be ready to go in and they don't have to trim. It goes into the machine and then it's ready to be cut into cylinder.

WN: Okay. So you go in with your sack, you pick the pineapples, leave the tops on when you're picking.

FB: Yeah. And when you reach the box at the end, then you start to cutting off all the tops.

WN: So you have a knife with you and you cutting the top?

FB: Yes.

WN: Do you do that right after you come out or you make a pile first?

FB: Well, you try to make a big pile first because you have to wait for the boxes to come. As you cut the top off, then you put it in the box.

WN: How many pines, on average, would fit in one box?

FB: On the average, you could put, I would say, maybe about sixteen to twenty in a box. Sometimes if they're small, then you put maybe thirty in a box. Usually the average size would be about a gallon size. So if they were a gallon size, then maybe you can put maybe a dozen. In those days, when they grow pineapple, you cannot say, oh, this pineapple is going to be a gallon size, half-a-gallon size. Those days, they were still working on seeing that you can get all the same size. But later on, most of the pineapple was all even.

WN: You mean, size-wise?

FB: All controlled.

WN: I see. So when they would say, "Today we're going to pick everything from one-eighth to full yellow fruit."

FB: Yeah. Anything from one-eighth. That means they would like to practically have everything picked from that field.

WN: And sometimes they would just say, "Today, only one-eighth."

FB: I mean, from one-eighth to full yellow. Sometimes they say, "Don't pick one-eighth. We want only from half." Half yellow. Because maybe they like to pick all the full-yellow pineapple first so that you don't waste time trying to pick up one-eighth or half. They would say, "Pick half yellow and up." But usually in the end, they'd say, "Pick pineapple." So if it's ripe [or not], it didn't make too much different because at the cannery, whether it's sweet or not, they added syrup to make it sweet.

WN: Did the *luna* ever scold you for not picking the right kind of pineapple?

FB: Well, the *luna* say sometimes, "How come you miss so much pineapple? We have to send someone back to do your job. You leave too many pineapple behind."

WN: You ever pick the wrong kind sometimes?

FB: Well, I try not to. (WN chuckles.) But that's how it was with harvesting. Of course, there were other jobs like later on they would tell you, "Today, you don't have to pick pineapple. You go and help drop boxes for the people who are picking." Oh, that was neat because you get to ride around and when you see someone who needs boxes, you just drop 'em couple boxes or several boxes. So that was a neat job, too. Working with pineapple was not too bad. At least we could have some spending money.

WN: So you had weeding first when you were a young boy.

FB: Yeah, weeding.

WN: Then you got into harvesting.

FB: Yeah.

WN: And then sometimes you did the boxes?

FB: Yeah.

WN: What other jobs?

FB: It was only six-hour job.

WN: This is summertime only?

FB: Yeah. Well, summertime or Saturdays.

WN: Oh, you worked Saturdays, too?

FB: Yeah. Only on Saturdays when school was going on. So go to school Monday through Friday. On Saturday, they let you work for six hours. So, once a week.

WN: I'm wondering, in your case, did you take mostly day wage or were you able to do enough so that you can get the contract pay?

FB: Most times day wages. Because we were little kids. We weren't strong enough to really harvest a lot. Some of the kids who were older than I, they were stronger. They could carry more and do more. And they were sent to where there was a lot of pineapple. Us, little kids, they usually sent us to where there weren't too much. So it was always day work mostly.

WN: So your gangs when you were a little kid, twelve years old, thirteen years old, you folks were all about same age?

FB: Yeah.

WN: Who were the *luna*s who supervised you guys when you were little kids?

FB: We had a *luna,* his last name was Nishimura. He's not the same Nishimura as the cowboy, [Susumu] Nishimura. Different Nishimura. He was one of the *luna*s I remember. I don't remember anyone else.

WN: And how was Nishimura as a *luna?*

FB: Oh, he was a good *luna.* He didn't bother too much. He would just say, "This is the place where you going to work today."

Of course, there were these field supervisors—they have a pickup truck—they come around and check, make sure everybody is working and not just sitting around. So that was the *luna.* They were okay. I didn't get that much scolding. He said, "Just stay in the line when it's almost *pau*

hana and don't take off your canvas pants or put away your things until it's time for go-home time."

WN: When you would come to work, what were you wearing? Would you already be wearing your canvas pants?

FB: I would bring my canvas pants, gloves, and goggles. Then my mom would prepare a bag for lunch. We had regular lunch pail. Rice and *okazu.* And of course, a bottle of water because you're going to be out there all day long.

WN: Where did you guys eat?

FB: We used to have mid-morning break. That's when everybody usually ate all their lunch. When it became a regular lunch, everybody already ate lunch. What we would do is find a place, go take a nap. Then when it's time to work again, the *luna* would blow his whistle and everybody would get up and start working.

WN: You folks would eat right on the side of the road?

FB: Yeah. We would usually sit on the road or inside of the field. Everybody would take their lunch out and then sit in a circle and everybody share each other's food. Some had good food. Some not too good.

WN: So you had the *kaukau tin,* right?

FB: Yeah.

WN: So you had the rice on the bottom in one layer and your have your *okazu* on another layer?

FB: Yeah. So first you would take what you want from yours and display the rest.

WN: So you put the *okazu* like in the middle of the circle?

FB: Yeah.

WN: Oh, I see. You folks can . . .

FB: Yeah. And everybody will share.

WN: But you keep your own rice.

FB: You keep your own rice. And depend on what you want to put on your rice. I know some people put catsup, *furikake,* or *shōyu.* I don't remember *furikake,* but I know *shōyu.*

WN: What kind *okazu* did people bring?

FB: All kinds. You can bring fried meats, fried fish, or sometimes people cook eggplant or something, what they call *pinakbet.* Or anything that you want.

WN: Your gang, your group, when you were working, young boy, was it like Japanese, Filipino, different kind?

FB: No.

WN: Was it mostly Filipino?

FB: Not segregated. All kinds. Everybody was working.

WN: So Japanese kids would bring the Japanese food?

FB: Yeah, they would have Japanese food. Filipino, they had mostly fried stuff, maybe sausages or the sardines. What is handy. But generally, everybody had rice. Japanese, Filipino, Hawaiian, they had rice. (WN chuckles.) That, and water.

WN: Everybody had the same kind of *kaukau tin* or different kind?

FB: Oh, yeah. Everybody was issued the same kind of *kaukau tin* because the *kaukau tin* you would go to the company storeroom or tool room and they would issue you a *kaukau tin*.

WN: Oh, you didn't have to buy it?

FB: No. Everything was same.

WN: So once they issue you the *kaukau tin* . . .

FB: Of course, when they issue you, I think they charge you for that. I don't know. I forgot.

WN: Oh, I see. So they issue you *kaukau tin,* and the goggles, and the . . .

FB: And then the gloves.

WN: Gloves.

FB: And your canvas pants.

WN: Canvas pants.

FB: Usually the lunch bag, our parents used to sew for us. Then they would issue you free goggles, free gloves, and free hoe, and that asparagus knife. Then when you terminate your work, you return all your tools.

WN: And the *kaukau tin,* too?

FB: No, the *kaukau tin,* you get to keep.

WN: But things like the goggles and the knife . . .

FB: Yeah. Oh, the goggles is for your eye protection. When your goggles get too bad already, you go to the tool room and tell, "Oh, my goggles not so good already." So you trade in your old one and then they give you a new one. But sometimes you tell, "Oh, I threw 'em away already." They still give you a new one because you need eye protection.

WN: When you were small-kid time, you had a *bangō?*

FB: Yes. My number was 2694—*bangō* number. Then when it was payday time, you would go up to the bank and then . . .

WN: Which bank? Bank of Hawai‘i?

FB: Used to be Bishop Bank, which is now First Hawaiian [Bank]. Then you would go there and then you collect your pay.

WN: Oh, you give ’em your *bangō?*

FB: They say, “What’s your *bangō* number?

I say, “2694.”

Then they find your *bangō* number, and then they give you your pay envelope, which was everything in cash. No check. On the envelope they would show you were charged for *kaukau tin,* you were charged for a new glove, like that.

WN: Oh, they deduct.

FB: Yeah. I don’t remember if they deduct for income tax. I didn’t file income tax anyway, those days. I forget already. So that’s how you collected your pay. That was once a month. Once a month pay envelope. Usually, I would get about twenty dollars for the month. Not too bad. We had some kind of spending money.

WN: Did you have to give any of your money to your parents?

FB: Yeah. I gave some to my mom and then I keep some for my own. But didn’t last too long.

(Laughter)

WN: Now I was wondering, after the harvesting season was over, did they have anything? Did the company have any kind of party like that?

FB: Oh, a party. Yes. The company would make some kind of program where they have games and—from what I can remember—free hot dogs. That was something. Eat all the hot dogs and buns you can eat.

WN: And this was where? Down at the ballpark?

FB: Yeah. At one time they had at Dole Park, there. Then at one time, I remember they had it down where near the service station is now across, that [former] baseball field. They set up booths where you could get free sodas, free hot dogs. The company sponsored all that. That’s for like helping out during the summer harvest. Everybody was invited, not just certain groups.

WN: So was hot dogs and soda?

FB: Yeah. But those days, that hot dog was something. You couldn’t just get hot dog anytime. Even at school, when we had hot dog and bun for lunch, oh, that was something. School lunch was all homemade—well, they would cook it there and it consisted of sometimes head cabbage and meat. Like beef *hekka* and things like that. I didn’t care too much for that. But when they had hot dog, oh, that was great. Those days, hot dog was the thing.

WN: Somebody told me like Thanksgiving time, the company would . . .

FB: Yeah, that's about Thanksgiving time.

WN: Oh, you mean, the harvest celebration was around Thanksgiving?

FB: Yeah.

WN: I see.

FB: Of course, Christmastime, the company would donate little Christmas presents for all the kids. Then that's how it was.

WN: What was the present?

FB: Everybody would be happy to have that.

WN: Was it candy?

FB: Christmastime, there was Christmas candy. Thanksgiving time, I remember it was hot dogs.

WN: Hot dogs.

FB: And soda.

WN: Did they have like music?

FB: Oh, I forgot. I was more interested in getting my share of the hot dogs. (WN chuckles.)

WN: Now, I know you graduated high school in 1951.

FB: Yes.

WN: Now '51 was also the year of the big strike here on Lānaʻi.

FB: Yes.

WN: What do you remember about the strike?

FB: Well, the strike—well, school was still going on. I don't know how we survived. No job. I don't know how we got money for. . . . Somehow, there was money around. Because we have to go to school, we have to buy lunch. Sometimes we have to buy our school supplies.

WN: Now your father was working for the company?

FB: Yes.

WN: Okay. So he was on strike, yeah?

FB: Yeah, he was on strike. I guess somehow he managed. How we got money, maybe we go to the store and you charge. You put it on account and they would write a bill [later] and they give you credit.

WN: Did all the stores do that during the strike?

FB: Yeah. Every one had those charge slips where you could charge food. I guess the stores were hurting, too. But everyone was going to school. Nobody said, "I cannot go to school." I guess the people who were on strike, they got some help from the other union people that weren't on strike.

WN: Do you remember soup kitchens?

FB: Oh, soup kitchens, yes. They had a soup kitchen near where International [Food and Clothing Center] is now. Then they would cook. Some of the strikers went off to Maui. They got donations even from the cabbage farms and they would send cabbages to cook in the soup kitchen. Some people used to go out fishing and they'd catch *aku.* They mix—cooked the *aku* with the cabbage.

WN: This is to feed the strikers and their families?

FB: To feed the strikers [and families].

WN: Do you remember eating in the soup kitchen?

FB: I did, yeah. It was, oh, not much. Cabbage and fish.

WN: What about rice?

FB: Rice, a little bit. Because they would cook and everybody would get a share. You eat in the soup kitchen. But other than that, we had something to eat. I never did feel I was starving. Somehow, we survived. I don't know about other people during the strike. Sometimes you would wait and people would negotiate and the strike would go on for one month, two months, and so on until I think they say it reached seven months [201 days]. I can't believe it went by like that. Yet, we were still going to school. We ate in the school cafeteria. We had lunch. I don't know how I paid for it. I guess my mom and my dad, they had some money stashed around someplace or they would borrow from somebody, I don't know. That's how we managed to have money to buy lunch.

WN: Do you remember your father on the picket lines?

FB: No, I don't remember. I don't know if they had picket lines or not. While they were on strike, we were in school.

WN: Do you remember your father saying anything about the strike? Hard time or anything like that?

FB: No. Not that I know of. So that's something that went by.

WN: That's interesting because you said there was a soup kitchen by the International [Food and Clothing Center] store .

FB: Yeah.

WN: Wasn't that Pedro de la Cruz's store?

FB: Yeah, but there was no store at that time.

WN: Oh, so the soup kitchen was where the store is now?

FB: Yeah.

WN: Oh, I see.

FB: The end closest to Pine Isle [Market] was where they did the cooking. The rest was just like a dining area.

WN: So you mean, they had like tables and chairs?

FB: Yeah. Benches.

WN: Benches.

FB: And tables, yeah. But I hardly went there to eat. Once in a while.

WN: So I know you had school lunch during the strike. What about like dinner time? You guys had dinner at home?

FB: Yeah. Sometimes. There was always something to eat. My parents, they managed to get something.

(WN gets water for FB. Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: Okay. So during the strike, you said there was no work for you folks because no more pineapple work, right?

FB: Yeah.

WN: Okay, so where did you go work?

FB: But then, like I said, during the strike, we were in school.

WN: Right, okay.

FB: So after the strike, then just around [September], the strike was over.

WN: You had just graduated?

FB: Yeah. I graduated. That was in June. So during the time the strike was still going on, they had a bowling alley. So at least we can go there and set pins [for work]. I used to make ten cents a game. Then if five people bowl on the two alleys or five or more, so that'd be about five times ten, so you had fifty cents for they play one game. If they play two games, that's a dollar, which they usually do.

WN: So how many lanes had in this bowling alley?

FB: There were four [lanes]. So you would take care of two. You get paid according to how many games were played. I think I remember if five people play, then that means five, eh? Times ten is fifty cents.

WN: I see. And if all five played two games . . .

FB: Yeah, they play two games, then that's a dollar. That's hard work for that.

WN: (Laughs) Yeah. So tell me now, you're in charge of two lanes [setting pins]. And somebody else has two lanes next to you.

FB: Yeah.

WN: Okay. So what do you do? You just . . .

FB: Well, you set up the . . .

WN: You set 'em up.

FB: Set 'em up for one lane.

WN: How did you set 'em up? How do you set up the pins?

FB: All by hand. You have to carry as much pins as you can and throw it into that frame where you set up the pins for the next roll. So usually, they take two balls to hit all the pins down. So you would pick up all the pins that . . .

WN: They knocked down.

FB: . . . they knocked down and then jump out of there and then they'll try and hit the remaining. Then if they miss, then you jump in again, and then you push down on your set thing. Then you lift 'em up, all everything is set. So the next . . .

WN: So you actually load the pins onto something?

FB: There's a frame where you put all your pins inside.

WN: Oh, kind of like when you rack up a pool table?

FB: Yeah.

WN: You rack 'em up?

FB: So you just drop 'em inside. Everything will go in. Then you push it down. When you come up, the pins will stay.

WN: All set. I see. Okay, so then you get all ten pins. Somebody rolls the ball, knocks down maybe seven pins, what do you do with the pins? You just leave it there?

FB: You just throw 'em in that frame thing. Then when you reset, you know, you just take out the pins—anyway, something like that—so that it clears the ones that don't have a pin.

WN: Where are you sitting or standing while they're bowling so that you don't get hit with the ball?

FB: When they're bowling, you usually sit in the center so you don't get hit with the ball. Either that, or when you set up one, then the other one would be ready. You'd be in the other alley. So you'd be setting up one and then they would be bowling in the other one. So you would be jumping back and forth.

WN: But the guys bowling know that don't bowl yet because the pinsetter is still down there?

FB: Yeah. When you're working, you have that thing down. They cannot roll the ball because your pinsetter is down. When you lift it up, then it would be ready.

WN: Got it. What about the ball?

FB: You pick it up and roll it. Put it in a—there was some kind of a trough and you roll it back to them.

WN: That's a lot of work! (Laughs)

FB: Yeah, but it's better than no work at all. You don't have work at all, you don't get paid.

WN: Yeah.

FB: So a lot of them, they didn't have a job. So I had money to spend. Other guys, not working, didn't have any.

WN: How did you get the job?

FB: Oh, someone told me, "They looking for a pinsetter." So I went to see the manager, and the manager at that time was Jane Gabriel's husband [John Gabriel]. So that was run by Lānaʻi Community [Welfare] Association. It's just like welfare, they call it. So that's how I got the job.

WN: And you would do that all day? How many hours . . .

FB: No, no. Usually people came to bowl in the evening time. So I would start maybe about five o'clock or six o'clock in the afternoon and then get done maybe about ten o'clock. So it was not too bad. When people start bowling, sometimes a lot of them bowl, you don't stop. You start from five and you don't stop until ten o'clock. So for hours, you're going back and forth, back and forth. Sometimes no rest.

WN: Ah, that's right, yeah?

FB: So very hard job. Although it's not too bad because at least you have some spending money.

WN: Right, right. So, again, this is during the strike. Did you have any other job during the strike besides the pin setting?

FB: Oh, I think that was about it. Not too much.

WN: Okay. So when the strike ended in August [September], right?

FB: Just about there.

WN: You were out of school. You were all *pau.* You graduated. What happened after that? Did you go back to pineapple field?

FB: Yeah. Helped with the harvest.

WN: So now this was more full-time work?

FB: But there wasn't too much to harvest. Because all this time, you know, the strike was going on. Nobody was taking care of the fields. Hardly any pineapple. Most of the work was weeding, trying to get all grass out of what pineapple they could save. In those days, the people that went to work, they went and used some kind of lawnmower to go in between the lines of whatever pineapple they had.

WN: To weed?

FB: And just trying to expose the pineapple so that the pineapple has a chance to grow. Remember, seven months, nobody was taking care of the pineapple. And there was hardly any to harvest. Because no fertilizing, no weeding. Was just like starting from scratch again. And we didn't get hired right away. So that's all after the strike. It was pretty hard.

WN: Must have been lot of work, huh?

FB: Yeah, lot of work. The company just like had to start all over again. Then some places, I guess, they had to do the regular pineapple plowing and replanting again. Then I guess they had to bring in planting material from the other plantations that weren't on strike.

WN: You mean, the slips?

FB: Yeah, slips and pineapple tops.

WN: The crowns.

FB: And the head. So it was a hard time.

WN: So when you got the job in 1951, what was your first—your first early job was cleaning up, I mean.

FB: Yeah, mostly. Mostly cleaning up. Helping with the replanting. When they plant, they plow the field, then they have to lay paper.

WN: The mulch?

FB: Yeah, the mulch paper. So one of our jobs we had to do, we had to help with the covering of the paper.

WN: What do you mean by, "covering the paper"?

FB: Yeah.

WN: Oh, you had to put paper on the . . .

FB: No, they had paper laying in sheaves. But then when they lay the paper, you have to cover the ends.

WN: Oh, with dirt? Cover with dirt.

FB: Yeah. Then some places, the paper didn't catch. So you would go and take another roll of mulch paper and lay it by hand and then cover it up. But all along the way you have to go patch, patch.

WN: By covering up, you mean covering the edges of the paper?

FB: Yeah, some places that weren't covered so good.

WN: You did that so the wind wouldn't blow the paper away?

FB: Oh, yeah. The wind would blow it away. That mulch paper was needed for the line so you can use it to plant the plants in the proper sequence. There was a lot of that. After most of that was done, then they laid off regular seasonal people. So you would have to wait another year for the harvest. Actually, it takes about almost two years for the pineapple to fruit. About twenty-one months. So after that, then everything gets busy again. We caught up.

WN: But after [19]51 you were full time?

FB: No.

WN: Oh, you were still seasonal?

FB: Seasonal. It was always seasonal. Not too many people got a chance to be full time until about 1957 or [19]58. Then they start hiring people almost full time. You had to pass, go through the seasonal. After that they call you a "non-regular." Until finally, after so many years, you get to be hired as a regular. But I didn't wait around to go into that stage.

WN: So what did you do?

FB: I went to work at the service station down here, which they call Lānaʻi City Service now. Used to be Nishimura Chevron.

WN: You said, though, before you started at Nishimura, you worked construction?

FB: Yes.

WN: So from [19]51, you said you worked construction.

FB: After the strike, I had a chance to go and work construction when they were building new buildings for the school. That was back maybe in 1952.

WN: So after you worked seasonal pine field, you were able to get this job in construction to help build the new school buildings?

FB: Yeah. Same as Alfred Lopez. He did mention working for construction.

WN: What company did you work for?

FB: That company was called South Pacific.

WN: You were helping to build the buildings for the new school?

FB: Yeah. Just a laborer. Cement work, tamping the ground down. It was not too bad. At least it was a job.

WN: Was the pay better than in pineapple field?

FB: Oh, yeah. The pay was better than pineapple field. That time, the pineapple field, I think, you made a dollar-something an hour.

WN: Oh, wow.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, what I want to do is—after that, you said you went to Big Island. You worked in ʻŌlaʻa, yeah? So we'll start from there next time and then we'll get into Nishimura service station days. So we'll continue next time and we'll finish up next time, I promise. But I just want to get you to talk about Nishimura and, you said you picked Kona coffee on the Big Island?

FB: Yeah.

WN: So I want to get into those kind of jobs. Then we get into Maui Soda. And then that's about it. Then, oh, school custodian. You were a full-time custodian at the school and still working part-time for Maui Soda. And then we'll talk about the future of Lānaʻi and what you think about the future of Lānaʻi.

FB: As far as most of the older people living, a lot of them don't know about historical places. Historical trees, historical buildings. So pretty soon, the ones that know don't know. (Chuckles)

WN: Well, you're one of the ones that know.

FB: Like you know the trees near the school cafeteria? You remember the line of trees? There's none. They cut 'em all down already. But there are still some fragments as you enter the school parking lot, near the teachers' cottage. There are some over there. Those are pretty recent.

WN: Okay, we're *pau*.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 56-40-3-13

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Felix Ballesteros (FB)

Lānaʻi City, Lānaʻi

May 9, 2013

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: Okay. Today is May 9, 2013, and I'm interviewing Felix Ballesteros for the third time. This is our third session. We're doing this for the Lānaʻi City oral history project. Interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

So Felix, good afternoon.

FB: Good afternoon.

WN: We left off last time having you just finishing up some construction in 1953, and then in '53 you said you went to the Big Island [Hawaiʻi Island] to work.

FB: Yes.

WN: Can you tell me where you went and why you went to work on the Big Island?

FB: Well, the reason I went to the Big Island, because I wanted to see if jobs were available there just as well as here. I thought I'd try and work with sugarcane comparison with pineapple. I found that working with sugarcane is just [like] another plantation. But, their crop was sugarcane. Beginning, I didn't know that sometimes you have to go in a sugarcane field that's not burnt. There would be a lot of leaves and grass that you cannot imagine where the lines of the sugarcane is. They said you take five lines and proceed and cut. But when I first started, the cane wasn't burnt because it rained so much, you couldn't burn the cane. You know, what they call *ʻōpala*.

WN: Tell me, where on the Big Island did you work—did you go?

FB: I went to ʻŌlaʻa Sugar Company. Which is about thirteen to fourteen miles from Hilo.

WN: How come your chose ʻŌlaʻa?

FB: Because my uncle was working for ʻŌlaʻa Sugar Company. He was sort of my sponsor. I went out there to the office and asked for work and right away they took me. No questions.

WN: Now I'm wondering, what did your uncle tell you about ʻŌlaʻa and sugar work?

FB: Well, he didn't say anything about the work except that I asked him if I can come to the Big Island and work. Maybe I would get better pay, in other words.

WN: Did you get better pay?

FB: Yes. At that time, better pay was about $1.08 an hour.

WN: And how much were you making in the pine field?

FB: About a dollar an hour or so in those days.

WN: Besides him being there, what other reasons did you want to leave Lānaʻi to go to work at ʻŌlaʻa?

FB: The main reason was a job, because here we were working as seasonals—only during the summer. At that time, the pineapple strike had just not too long been settled. So I wanted to see if I could get a steady job instead of a seasonal job. So, I tried sugarcane and they said it was a permanent job. They hired me as a permanent worker. I worked for over a year continuously, which was good because there was no break. You could have wages throughout the year.

Until such a time that they said, "We're going to mechanize." So instead of handheld machetes to cut the cane down, they would use machines to do the harvesting. They didn't need the extra workers to go with a machete to cut the cane down, so they started laying people off. One by one—ʻŌlaʻa was one of the first to start mechanized harvesting.

Other places, they still used a machete, but then when we tried to get assigned to their company, they said, "We have enough people right now." Because the people that they had doing the harvesting were sufficient to do it. But gradually, all the plantations got mechanized. Little by little, people were getting laid off. They didn't need that many people on the plantation. From there, a lot of people moved to other places. Some came back to Lānaʻi, like myself.

WN: Before we get to that, I just wanted to ask you. When you first started working at ʻŌlaʻa, what were your jobs on the sugar plantation? What did you do?

FB: The first thing I was hired for at ʻŌlaʻa was to harvest the cane. Just go in there with a machete—a cane knife—and cut the cane.

WN: This was after they burned it?

FB: Yeah. Sometimes—most of the time they burnt the cane. When they cannot burn the cane you go in there and cut *ʻōpala* and rubbish together. You put it all in one bundle. That's all that I did in the beginning, but then after a while I was fortunate enough to go to the harvesting where they load cut cane into cane trucks to be hauled away.

So I was with the loading crew. When I was on the loading crew, there were three shifts. The first shift started at six o'clock in the morning and ended at two o'clock, which was a straight eight hours. From two o'clock—the second shift—to ten o'clock. And then from—the night shift we call the graveyard shift—from ten o'clock to six o'clock in the morning. You would have that loading machine—a Northwest Crane—running continuously for six days, twenty-four hours a day. The only thing that had a rest would be the crews.

WN: You were saying this was continuously.

FB: The machine was running continuously.

WN: What machine is this?

FB: This is a Northwest Crane.

WN: Oh, it's a crane.

FB: They used a crane to lift up the bundles of cane and drop into the cane truck.

WN What was your job?

FB: My job was, sometimes, to coil up cables that were wrapped around the bundles of cane.

WN: I see.

FB: Sometimes my job was to pull the cable from the crane to the bundle and hook it on.

WN: Did you get more pay doing this than you were cutting cane?

FB: You would get the same pay but then you don't have to go and tackle the cane. It would be a much cleaner job.

WN: So how did you get that job? Did you . . .

FB: Well, because my uncle was with the loading crew, and they needed three separate crews. Some of them went off and they didn't come back to work for the company, so they said, "We need people to fill in loading crew." So that was my last assignment while working for sugarcane—on the loading crew.

WN: You said that you lost your job because of mechanization?

FB: Yeah.

WN: So how did mechanization affect the loading of the cane?

FB: Well, mechanization in the beginning, it would be easy to go with the machine. What they did was just uproot everything, and in the process they would get large boulders of stone going down to the mill. In the beginning they were getting lot of breakage at the sugar mill, because they couldn't get all of the boulders out properly. But they kept on working on it and making sort of a screen where boulders would fall through and the sugarcane would stay on top. After that they got the harvesting done much faster. They didn't have to be worrying about breakdown because they got their machines properly repaired at the mill where you don't have boulders going into the crusher itself.

WN: I see.

FB: That's why afterwards all the plantations had mechanized harvesting.

WN: They didn't need someone to check to see and make sure boulders are not put into the . . .

FB: Well, they didn't have to worry about the boulders because they have enough screening down at the mill. Before the cane reached the crushers, all the boulders were screened through.

WN: If you were to compare sugar work with pineapple work, which one was harder?

FB: In the beginning, people said pineapple had a lot of thorns. It's true. Some of the pineapple had a lot of thorns. Later on as they experimented with pineapple, they found different varieties. Only the tip of the leaves was pointed. Early days, pineapple used to grow over five feet tall. You can imagine going through and picking up pineapple with pineapple growing that tall.

WN: Five feet?

FB: Yeah. Gradually, they found different varieties where fruit that wasn't that tall. So after that, working with pineapple was not too bad. I found that pineapple is a great job.

WN: So one difference is the pineapple had thorns. The sugarcane didn't have thorns.

FB: Sugarcane, when you go through fields that had been burned, there is a lot of black soot. It would make your clothes stained with black. To me it was much more dirtier. But then, it was all right.

The difference, pineapple I think was much easier to work with, unlike sugarcane where you have to go in there with your machete and chop all those stalks. Some places working with sugarcane, you have to cut the cane and bundle it up. They have workers to carry it out to the end of the road so that it could be loaded. Machines usually don't go into the place where the sugarcane was growing, because sometimes it was too hilly and you can't operate your machine on hilly place. They would have to make—tie your cane in bundles and carry it out to the roads so that the machine can pick it up. That's why where I worked at ʻŌlaʻa, they had a crane with a cable and you could pull the cable out to where the cane was, where the person who cut the cane puts it in a bundle and tied it up with a cable. All you have to do is pull the cable from the crane to the bundle that had cable ties. Then the crane would pull it to the rope. The crane didn't go to where the plants are. It was just on the road. Or just on the side of the road, so they could pick up the bundle and load it into the truck. Where I worked at ʻŌlaʻa it was with a cable and you would bundle the sugarcane and the bundle would be as big as a king-sized bed and maybe about four feet high.

WN: That was one bundle?

FB: One bundle. So the cutting of cane at ʻŌlaʻa Sugar [Company] was quite easy because all you have to do is put your cane in a bundle about the size of a king-size bed or more and then all you have to do is chop the bottom and let it fall in your bundle. Then you would just trim it. Other places you had to bundle it up and they would have workers that would be carrying the bundles out to the road and make a pile so that they could load it into the truck. In some places, they had what they call a flume cane where they have water running. It would carry the bundle through that flume—a trough. With water running, the water would take it down to where it would be loaded into a truck or a cane-hauling train. With the cane cars.

WN: They had flumes at ʻŌlaʻa?

FB: Flume cane?

WN: Did they have?

FB: No. Not that I know of. Maybe in the beginning they had, but someone said, "Why don't we use cables?"

WN: (Laughs) Yeah.

FB: Tie it up with a cable and then attach it to the cable of the crane and the crane would haul it out to the road.

Then there was another job that someone could do. What they would do is pick up loose stalks that were left in the field and bundle it up likewise. The crane would pick it up and load it into the truck. They call that *lilikō*.

WN: Did you do that?

FB: No. I didn't do that. You had to walk all over the field and pick up all the loose cane.

WN: I thought that was more like a young-boy kind of job. No?

FB: Young-boy jobs—I think their job was taking care of the tall grass.

WN: Oh. Weeding?

FB: Yeah. Cultivating.

WN: What about *wahine* job?

FB: They also had that job.

WN: The *hō hana*?

FB: The *hō hana*, yeah.

WN: But *wahine* didn't do *lilikō*?

FB: There were some of the older ladies I think that did it.

WN: I see.

FB: Yeah, the older ladies. Not the younger. The younger student workers I imagine they used them for cultivating only. Then maybe replanting, where if there was vacant spot they would go there and plant seed cane.

WN: Seed cane. I see.

FB: But I didn't see any of them. Where I worked was mostly where it was being harvested.

WN: So you said that after about one year they were laying off people because of mechanization, and you got laid off?

FB: Yeah, that was about 1954.

WN: From the time you were laid off, what happened? Did you come right back to Lānaʻi?

FB: When I was laid off, I went all over the Big Island, Hawaiʻi to look for a job. I looked in the newspaper, and then sometimes I would go to a used car lot and ask them if I can be a used car

salesman. But never got to that point. I even went to service stations and asked them, "Can I work for you?" Because here on Lāna'i I used to work at the service station changing oil for the cars, and greasing it up.

WN: This was before when you were younger?

FB: Yeah. But then they said no. In the meantime, I kept on collecting unemployment compensation. Then at one time I heard they were looking for people to plant seed cane, so I got to go and plant seed cane for an independent farmer in Kalapana where the volcano is. I planted seed cane in places where you wouldn't think cane would grow. There was only lava rock around. So you'd put your seed cane and get some places where you had dirt and put dirt on it. The rest, nature will take care of, because it rained quite a bit.

WN: Ahh. Right, right.

FB: Around 'Ōla'a.

WN: So this independent cane cultivator, he would sell his cane to 'Ōla'a Sugar Company?

FB: Yeah. When their cane was ready for harvesting, they would tell 'Ōla'a Sugar Company to harvest it, and they would get paid by the amount of tonnage their sugarcane brought in. The way they figured out how much tonnage it had is that on the crane itself there was a scale that as you loaded your cane it would know how many pounds it had. So they'd know how much was harvested.

So I planted sugarcane for about one week and then it was done. (WN chuckles.) So the farmer paid us off and we were unemployed again.

WN: When you say "we", was that you and your uncle, or. . . .

FB: No. My uncle was still working for another sugar company. So, I had to be by myself. Do my own cooking, and do my own laundry.

WN: Where was this at? Your uncle's house? Where did you live?

FB: No. This was at Pāhoa on the Big Island.

WN: Oh, when you were working seed cane.

FB: Yeah.

WN: And when you were working for 'Ōla'a where did you live?

FB: I lived in Mountain View at fourteen miles.

WN: Mountain View? Where your uncle lived, or. . . .

FB: Yeah, he lived there until we were all laid off.

WN: I see.

FB: In front of that famous stone cookie bakery [Mountain View Bakery].

WN: (Laughs) Now, you also said you worked—you went to Kona to pick coffee.

FB: I did. I tried picking coffee, but it was not really work. I had friends in Kona and they'd said come and try it. They put a basket in front of you to put your coffee beans in.

WN: You tied it around your waist?

FB: Yeah.

WN: The *lau hala* basket.

FB: Yeah. And then they'd give you a piece of stick which they called a stirrup, and you would hook the branch you couldn't reach and step on the other end which was a stirrup, and you start picking the ripe beans. The beans with color.

WN: So the trees were so tall that you have to use that stick to bend it**.**

FB: Yeah, you know the branches. People who pick coffee, they know what you're talking about when you say "stirrup".

WN: Stirrup.

FB: A stick with a . . .

WN: The name of the stick was called stirrup?

FB: Well, because it's just like the stirrup on a horse saddle. You would stick your feet—you know where you put your feet on the saddle on the bottom, the stirrup?

WN: Yeah.

FB: With that you'd pull the branch down, stick your feet in the stirrup, and then hold the branch down so you can pick the coffee beans.

WN: I see. And you had to pick only the red beans?

FB: Only the red beans or if they had a little color on them. It's a very tedious job. (WN chuckles.) But, people can pick maybe two bags or three bags a day. Those bags were not like 100-pound sack, it was maybe I would say a 300-pound sack. Combine three of those and that's the sack they put the coffee beans in.

WN: And you got paid by the sack? The number of sacks you filled?

FB: Yeah. So now comes the other part. When they pick the coffee beans, the owner of that coffee land would take it to where his house is. There, he has this machine to take off the skin or the shell from the coffee bean so you would have only the seed part. I was fortunate enough to see how it's done. It goes through this machine and it takes off all the skin [and pulp]. Then all that coffee seed part would go into just like a little bathtub. You know where you take a bath—a *furo*. Then you'd stir it up, wash it a little bit, and then you would take the coffee beans and they have these houses. Just like a garage but it has a floor with a roof. You would slide the roof open—you could move the roof off—then it would spread all your shelled coffee beans on that and it had to be dried.

WN: Dried out in the sun?

FB: Out in the sun. But the roof could be moved back and forth. In case it rained, you'd push the roof back over the drying beans.

WN: I see, so they had a platform that they put the coffee on. Then they had a moveable roof you can drag over it in case it rained.

FB: Yeah. Until today you still have that. If it's not raining, the roof would be off. The machine that this friend of mine was using was a one-cylinder gas engine. It had no radiator. The cylinder block had a hole and you had water to cool it off. One of those old machines. Nowadays I assume they have an electric motor. It was all connected by sort of a conveyor belt to the grinding machine.

WN: So it would grind it from cherry coffee into what?

FB: They call that "pach". After it's dried you would take it, you would bag it up, and take it to the coffee mill or someone would buy it from you.

WN: Was that parchment they called it? Parchment coffee or. . . .

FB: The seed that you take off from the coffee beans that were harvested and then after when you dry it, they call it "pach". The raw coffee before it's roasted.

WN: I'll get some water for you. Water, yeah?

FB: Thank you.

WN: I'll be right back.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: So we're talking about you working for Kona coffee, picking . . .

FB: I wasn't actually working, I just. . . .

WN: Oh, well you got paid though? You didn't get paid?

FB: Not on the coffee. This was my friend's coffee land and I was there so I was fortunate enough to see how it's done.

WN: Yeah, but you got paid to pick the coffee though?

FB: No. The lady said, "Would you like to see how it's done and try it?" And I tried. I had a basket that was over a gallon. You could still see the bottom (WN laughs) of the basket because I didn't pick that much.

WN: So you never really got paid to work picking coffee.

FB: Just my friend's place and I just was there fooling around.

WN: It wasn't like if you liked it or you were good at it you could have had a job?

FB: Yeah, but [only] if I was there when it was peak season. But at that time they were just picking the stray berries.

WN: I see.

FB: But then you know I was fortunate enough to see the process. The coffee that you drink today, the coffee beans, those what you call "pach" has to be roasted first and then ground so that you can make a cup of coffee. (WN laughs.) So the beginning process I knew.

WN: Well I bet you appreciate a good cup of coffee now. I bet you like (laughs).

FB: Yeah. When they brew coffee it's really a good-smelling coffee. They say Kona coffee is one of the best. I don't know why. I guess maybe the climate or the volcanic ash?

WN: Yeah, it's the soil—volcanic soil.

FB: The soil? I guess so. That's the story about coffee.

WN: Okay, so now you came back to Lānaʻi, right? In 1955?

FB: Yeah, about 1955 because I stayed there until I used up all my unemployment.

WN: I see, so you figured you have to come back.

FB: In the meantime I was looking for a job, but there was no job.

WN: So when you came back to Lānaʻi. . . .

FB: To work in pineapple.

WN: Okay. So when you came back to Lānaʻi what did you do? What kind of. . . .

FB: I worked with pineapple. Harvesting. Afterwards I was with the land preparation people where they laid paper for planting.

WN: Oh. The mulch.

FB: Yeah. Mulch paper. At that time there was also night shift, so I worked night shift also if I was assigned to night shift. The way you did it was—it's at night, you need light. So there's no electricity for you to use, so what you use for light was a Coleman gasoline lantern. That was what we used. We worked from 2:00 to about 10:30 at night. Covering the mulch paper. That was during the summer.

WN: How did that job work? The mulch was in rolls?

FB: Yeah, they had this tractor with a mechanism in the back. It would lay three rolls of mulch paper at a time. The tracker would be pulling as the mulch paper unrolled. As it went along, it would cover the edges of the mulch paper but in some places the mulch paper got hung up and it wasn't covered properly, so my job was to go walk behind of the tractor, and as it went if I found any places where it wasn't covered properly, I would cover it.

WN: When you say cover, you're just covering the edges?

FB: The edges.

WN: I see. Why did you have to do that?

FB: To hold the paper down.

WN: Ahh, I see. So in case wind blows.

FB: Yeah. If not, the wind comes and it will blow all the paper off. So your job was to go and make sure it doesn't fly away.

WN: So the tractor in front of you would put dirt over the edge of the mulch.

FB: Yeah. As it went along . . .

WN: The mulch was about how wide? One foot?

FB: Actually, the mulch paper is maybe about three feet wide. Maybe about seven inches on each side of the paper was covered.

WN: With dirt.

FB: As the tractor was pulling the machine along. But then like I said, sometimes because of lumps in the soil or the dirt it will get uncovered, so your job was to go and cover it up. Some places you would put—where joined you would put some dirt on it so it doesn't fly away. Every so many feet you would put some more dirt on it to hold it down. Especially after that they came out with plastic. Paper was very easy to be blown away.

WN: Your time it wasn't plastic? What was it?

FB: It was plastic already. So in the beginning it used to be made of tar paper. Afterwards they came out with plastic.

WN: I see. So you would walk around with a shovel?

FB: No, you walk around with a hoe that had a wide blade on the bottom so that when you were to put some dirt on paper, you'd have a big blade to pull the dirt onto the paper. I did that until all that summer work—seasonal again—was finished, and I decided I think I want a steadier job, so I went to the service station and worked.

WN: I see. So, before we get to service station, the tractor was putting dirt over the edges of the mulch?

FB: Yeah, it has sort of a narrow. . . . As it went along it would dig a hole, push the paper in . . .

WN: Oh, the tractor did all of that?

FB: They call that a paper sled.

WN: Paper sled? I see.

FB: They had a crew of three persons on the paper sled. Each one would control a roll of paper. When you see that the roll was getting smaller, the tractor usually don't stop. You just have to be ready

and get your paper connected. So that was the job of the crew. They had three men on the paper sled. There would be maybe two of us doing the covering of the paper.

WN: I see. This is the same paper that's laid out and the planters would poke a hole in the paper to plant the material.

FB: Yes. All pre-marked.

WN: Oh, it was marked?

FB: Yeah. The planter didn't have to worry where he would put his plant. And use his planting knife to poke at it.

WN: Poke a hole in the mulch, put the crown [i.e., seed] inside.

FB: Yeah.

WN: I get it. I see.

FB: So that was the land preparation part. That was before the planter could go in and plant the seed for the pineapple.

WN: How did you get paid for this kind of work?

FB: It was already set.

WN: Day labor. Day wage.

FB: You work eight hours and you would get paid—I think the pay was about $1.10 or something like that an hour. Automatically you would be working eight hours and that's your pay.

WN: I see. So were you happy to come back to Lānaʻi and have a job?

FB: Oh yeah! (WN laughs.) Because I had no money left on the Big Island. So that's all I could do.

WN: Were you homesick on the Big Island? Did you get homesick?

FB: Well, in the beginning—the first two days—I got homesick. But then, after that I start going around. In the beginning I had no car. But after several paychecks I went down to the used car lot and bought a car for ninety-five dollars.

WN: What kind of car?

FB: It was a Plymouth 1938. (WN chuckles.) The car was great help because then I was mobile after that. I could go to Hilo anytime, or go wherever I wanted to go.

WN: But when you came back to Lānaʻi what did you do? You sold the car?

FB: I sold the car. Yes. I sold it for more than what I bought it for.

WN: Oh? (Laughs)

FB: It was a good car. It was able to go all the way to Kona, which is a hundred miles away.

WN: You went on Saddle Road?

FB: I went on what they call Volcano Road.

WN: Okay.

FB: You have to go drive up from Mountain View up to the volcano.

WN: Then you were in Pāhala? Pāhala and. . . .

FB: Yeah. That's where the road is—as far as you can see—it was straight. You don't see too many places where the road is like that.

WN: Okay, so after you came back to Lānaʻi and you started working pineapple again and you worked for the planting department, you wanted more of a full-time, permanent job.

FB: We were seasonal workers.

WN: Seasonal workers. So it seems like you were always seasonal, yeah?

FB: Yeah. That's how the company was doing it. After they laid me off I said, "Why not go work for the service station?" So I worked for the service station.

WN: How did you get that job?

FB: I went to see the owner and he said okay.

WN: This was [Susumu and Shigeo] Nishimura?

FB: Nishimura.

WN: Nishimura Service Station.

FB: Yeah. So all I did was change oil and lubricate cars. I wasn't a mechanic. Repair flat tires. Until I started to fool around with cars, then I started doing repairs. Little by little I taught myself how to be a mechanic. But then when the summer came around for seasonal workers to work again, pick pineapple, I said, "No, I don't want to go out there and pick pineapple." So, I continued working for the service station. As I worked, I learned how to repair cars. So later on, pineapple [company]—they said now they're starting a new program where you become instead of only seasonal they put you down as non-regular.

WN: Non-regular?

FB: You're just like a regular worker but you're non-regular. Eventually you could become a permanent worker. I said, "I don't want to do that again." They say you're going to be a permanent worker? Fine, but then I think I'll stick with the service station. And I stick with the service station for about twenty-one years, and during that time I progressed from just plain changing oil and lubrication to a full-fledged mechanic. That's how I learned how to do mechanic work. I didn't go to school. I learned how to weld. I learned how to [work on] body and fender. Automotive.

WN: Wow, so you fixed body and fender too?

FB: Yes.

WN: Wow.

FB: We had to do that. But mainly, it was mostly engine, transmission, and brake jobs.

WN: Wow.

FB: And electrical wiring.

WN: And you were there for twenty-one years so, I guess cars have changed right? Like automatic—manual to automatic transmissions.

FB: Automatic transmission—I eventually learned how to repair automatic transmission too, because I had to go into it. There was nobody to do it, so I said I'll give it a try and take it apart. Put some new parts, and it worked. It was quite easy.

WN: So you were the only mechanic at Nishimura, or were there others?

FB: Others came and they went. A lot of them moved on to another place. But as we went by, I stuck it out for twenty-one years.

WN: So from 1956. . . .

FB: From 1956 until 1979.

WN: So more than twenty-one years. It was about twenty-three years?

FB: Yeah.

WN: You also said that you serviced the company vehicles?

FB: Yeah, at one time, about 1964 maybe—the company decided to lease their vehicles from a leasing company. So, the leasing company put Nishimura Service [Station] as the repair shop for the company vehicles. So all the company vehicles, we had to repair. Flat tire, transmission, automatic transmissions, trouble call. If they have problem in the field, we'd have to go to the field and repair it. We had clutch jobs, brake jobs, transmission jobs.

WN: And you folks repaired the tractors too?

FB: No, no. This was only sedans and pickup trucks. The tractors and heavy trucks was all [repaired by] the company, but they didn't repair any of the small cars like sedans that supervisors used and the other people who needed pickup trucks in the field.

WN: So the company had their own motor pool and mechanic and so forth?

FB: Yes.

WN: I see. So you folks were like on contract.

FB: Yeah. We had a contract with the leasing company.

WN: I see.

FB: The company had their own people to repair their trucks and tractors. But they didn't do any repairing of regular cars. Before that they had company cars to use, and they would do all the repairs for that. So that's what the company did—for several years they did that. Every year after so many years of use, they would have brand new cars to use. So that's how it went, until they decided they would change back and take care of their own vehicles.

WN: I see.

FB: So at one time I was the only mechanic that would have to do all of the work on those cars. I was quite busy, (WN laughs) because sometimes I was the only one mechanic to do all of that. Sometimes the boss would help, but most of the time I had to do it. Trouble call, change transmissions, repair transmission, change the plug, change brakes, change the exhaust system.

WN: It was steady work.

FB: Yeah.

WN: You had steady work. And who was the boss?

FB: For the service station? It was Jimmy Nishimura.

WN: Jimmy Nishimura.

FB: We call him Shigeo.

WN: Shigeo?

FB: Yeah. Co-owner, Susumu.

WN: Oh, okay. That was his brother?

FB: Yeah.

WN: You also had a part-time job at Maui Soda?

FB: Yes.

WN: When did you start doing that?

FB: About 1975.

WN: Nineteen seventy-five. And why did you start doing that?

FB: Well, beginning was, I thought maybe I could get a lot of free soda.

WN: Free soda?

FB: Free soda. You know, damaged soda? (WN chuckles.) Drinks for free. But it wasn't like that. Because when I was working for the soda company, I didn't drink too much soda. (WN chuckles.) But, I stuck on with part-time job with the soda company.

WN: What were your duties? What did you do?

FB: Actually, about the same what I'm doing today. But except that I just ordered the soda, put in the warehouse. When the businesses needed soda, I would just deliver it to them and that was it. Unlike today, I take the products and place it in their coolers for the customer.

WN: Oh, you mean at the stores?

FB: Yeah. So, we got time? Are we ready to go?

WN: Okay, I wanted to just—can we take five more minutes?

FB: Okay.

WN: So you worked at Maui Soda and you're still working for Maui Soda today. Then in '79 you started working full time as a school custodian.

FB: Yeah.

WN: Then you did that from '79 to '93.

FB: Yeah.

WN: Then you retired.

FB: Yeah.

WN: But you're still working Maui Soda.

FB: Yes.

WN: We've come to the end, I just want to ask you. You've lived in Lānaʻi all these years, from a young boy time. What can you say about living on Lānaʻi? Is it good? What are the . . .

FB: Lānaʻi is a very nice place to stay. To raise a family—I don't know about young people. They want to go out and see the world. But as far as Lānaʻi, it's a great place to stay. You cannot find a place like Lānaʻi today. I don't think so, because wherever you go, people mostly are strangers. It's not free and easy as like Lānaʻi. Other places you go, you have traffic lights, so many people going by. Here we are a pretty neat community. You can be walking around, you don't have to worry about people coming to give you problems. You don't have people watching you and all of a sudden someone breaks into your place. Here, a lot of people leave their doors open yet. They don't lock it. They don't lock their house. But I lock my house. On Maui, you don't know the next-door neighbor sometimes. Lānaʻi is unique. Here you can go fishing. You don't have to worry about when you go fishing and someone is going to come there and take your things and do something to your car. Other places I don't know.

Then they want to develop Lānaʻi. [David] Murdock came and if it weren't for Murdock we wouldn't have these hotels. I don't know if someone else would come and do a hotel. From

pineapple to tourist industry. As you can see today, the pineapple plantations have all closed down. Sugarcane is the same. On Maui we still have, but the other islands, no. So, we're fortunate that we have people like Murdock, and now we have [Larry] Ellison.

WN: You know, you've seen the changes that have taken place on Lānaʻi. So what would you like to see? What would you like to see to be the future of Lānaʻi?

FB: Well, as far as the future of Lānaʻi, a lot of people say, "We don't want this. We don't want that." But, you have to progress. You cannot stay back and say we don't want all these people here. But that's what's keeping the people on Lānaʻi alive. If we didn't have tourism, where would we be today? They said we have pineapple, but if you were the owner would you continue to do pineapple here where there is so much regulations? Other islands they have pineapple, but as you can see pineapple is no longer here. So we're lucky we got started from people like Murdock. Now Ellison, I don't know what other improvements he'd like to do, but I think progress.

WN: Would you like to see agriculture continue on this island?

FB: Yes. But then you have to find a viable type of agriculture to do here. One thing that we have to watch is our supply of oil. Are we going to go and use it and use it until we don't have oil? We have to get some kind of replacement for it.

WN: You mean energy?

FB: Yeah. So there's a lot of space to do that here, because you can go and use another kind of fuel for your car, but what are you going to use for your planes? We have to develop something to make jet fuel. They could work on getting some kind of crops to grow to make jet fuel. In the meantime, we have to conserve our oil. When I go and when you go, we may still have oil, but when that's gone what's going to fly our airplanes if we don't find another jet fuel? In the meantime we have to conserve the oil that we have. And how do we do that? By using whatever we can get to cut down our use of oil.

One thing that's cutting down the use of oil is solar energy—the sunshine. Another thing is windmills. You've seen that on Maui. They plan to do windmills here. Fine. That's another step to conserving our oil that we have left. If we don't have oil, we have to work on something to replace oil. But when will that happen? Maybe we can find some kind of crops that we can use to produce some kind of fuel. You have corn oil, which turns to Wesson oil. That can be burned in our diesel trucks or vehicles. Try to save whatever oil we have.

WN: Say if Mr. Ellison were to walk in right now and say, "Mr. Ballesteros, what do you think we should be doing for the future of this island?" What would you tell him?

FB: If I had enough money I would do research to see what we can plant on this island to help preserve our oil supply.

WN: Well, I think you said it.

FB: In the future—I don't know how many—hundred years more, we'll have oil. But unless we have a replacement, we'll be in the dark using horses. And how are we going to go fly faster to California? We're going to have to ride one of those steamships or oil-burning ships that don't need jet fuel. Can you imagine taking a boat to California? That's why they say, "Slow boat to California."

WN: Okay. Felix, thank you so much for your time.

FB: You're welcome.

WN: I appreciate it. I think your memory is fantastic.

FB: Thank you.

WN: I think we're all richer for it because we're learning so much from you. So thank you so much.

FB: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

Lānaʻi:
Reflecting on the Past; Bracing for the Future

Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa

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